

Message Text

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FOR JOHN HIRSCH

FOLLOWING REPEAT TEL AVIV 3217 ACTION SECSTATE LONDON INFO
AMMAN CAIRO DAMASCUS JERUSALEM DTD 16 MAY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IS

SUBJECT:CONVERSATION WITH SHIMON PERES

SUMMARY: PERES REMAINS HOPEFUL THAT THE ALIGNMENT WILL
DO WELL IN THE ELECTION. HE CONSIDERS THAT GOVERNMENT
FORMATION COULD TAKE UP TO TWO MONTHS. ALL SCENARIOS
FOR COALITION PARTNERSHIPS ARE MERE SPECULATION UNTIL
THE VOTE RESULTS ARE KNOWN. HE DOES NOT RULE OUT A
COALITION BETWEEN THE ALIGNMENT AND THE LIKUD "WITHOUT
BEGIN." END SUMMARY

1. CHARGE AND POLITICAL OFFICER MET WITH PERES THIS
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MORNING IN HIS OFFICE AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. ALSO
PRESENT WAS HIS POLITICAL ADVISER, ASHER BEN NATAN.
CHARGE BEGAN THE DISCUSSION BY THANKING PERES FOR
MEETING WITH THE NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY THE PREVIOUS
DAY IN THE MIDST OF A STRENUOUS ELECTION CAMPAIGN
(TEL AVIV 3175).

2. PERES SAID THAT DOMESTIC ISSUES WERE TAKING PRECEDENCE OVER FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CAMPAIGN. LABOR UNREST, INFLATION AND THE SOCIAL GAP WERE RECEIVING MORE ATTENTION THAN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS ISSUE, WHICH, IN ANY EVENT, IS SURROUNDED BY "COMPLETE CONFUSION."

3. TURNING TO POST-ELECTION GOVERNMENT FORMATION, PERES WAS ASKED IF HE WOULD BE ABLE TO BRING THE NRP INTO A COALITION IN VIEW OF THE RECENT CHANGES IN THAT PARTY. HE INDICATED THAT PRE-ELECTION CHANGES IN A PARTY COULD BECOME IRRELEVANT AFTER THE BALLOTS ARE COUNTED. HE STRESSED THAT ALL TALK OF A FUTURE COALITION IS PRESENTLY PURE SPECULATION; EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON THE ELECTION RESULTS. THE OUTCOME WILL AFFECT THE CHARACTER OF ALL PARTIES AND THEIR WEADERSHP. ISRAELI PARTIES DEPEND A GREAT DEAL ON PERSONALITIES. IF, FOR EXAMPLE, THE LIKUD GAINS A FEW SEATS, BEGIN WILL EMERGE MUCH STRONGER. ON THE OTHER HAND, SHOULD IT LOSE A FEW, BEGIN MIGHT DISAPPEAR AND THE LIKUD WITHOUT BEGIN IS LIKE "ISLAM WITHOUT MOHAMMED." IF THE DMC'S RESULTS ARE DISAPPOINTING, MANY WILL LEAVE THAT PARTY. WITH 15 SEATS, FOR EXAMPLE, THE DMC WILL HAVE A STRONG ROLE; WITH, SAY 8, IT WILL HAVE FAILED TO MEET ITS MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS AND YADIN WOULD LIKELY NOT REMAIN. ASKED WHETHER THE SAME ANALYSIS WOULD APPLY TO THE ALIGNMENT, PERES ANSWERED THAT HE COULD NOT BE ACUSED IF THE ALIGNMENT LOSES SOME SEATS BECAUSE HE TOOK OVER LEADERSHIP AT THE LAST MOMENT AND UNDER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. SHOULD IT DO WELL IN THE ELECTION (I.E., BETTER THAN THE POLLS SHOWED WHEN HE SUCCEEDED RABIN), HE WOULD BE GIVEN THE CREDIT. PERES ADDED THAT HE HOPED TO DO BETTER THAN THE POLLS HAD INDICATED, ALTHOUGH HE WOULD NOT MAKE A PREDICTION. (COMMENT: THE LATEST YEDIOT AHRONOT POLL GIVE THE ALIGNMENT 39 OR 40 SEATS AND THE LIKUD 35 OR 36.)

4. ASKED ABOUT THE DMC DECLARATION THAT IT WOULD NOT JOIN A COLAITION WHICH DOES NOT INSIST ON TIGHT RESTRICTIONS ON PARTY (ECONOMIC) ACTIVITY, PERES (WHO SEEMED UNAWARE OF THE DMC'S 7 CONDITIONS UNTIL THERE WERE EXPLAINED (TEL AVIV 3166) DISMISSED ITS SIGNIFICANCE BY ASSERTING THAT ALL SUCH CONDITIONS ARE ONLY GOOD UNTIL THE ELECTION; THE OUTCOME WILL DETERMINE EVERYTHING. "TAMIR DIDN'T JOIN THE DMC TO STICK TO CONDITIONS." PERES TURNED ASIDE THE QUESTION WHETHER THE NRP AND DMC WERE BOTH LIKELY CANDIDATES FOR AN ALIGNMENT-LED COALITION BY SAYING THAT UNTIL THE ELECTION RESULTS ARE IN, ALL SUCH

SPECULATION IS IDLE. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE LIKUD WITHOUT BEGIN WOULD BE A GOOD CANDIDATE, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, FOR A COALITION WITH THE ALIGNMENT. PERES DENIED THAT HE HAD MADE A COMMITMENT TO MAPAM NOT TO INCLUDE THE LIKUD IN HIS GOVERNMENT. HE HAD MERELY SAID THAT EXCEPT IN THE CASE OF A NATIONAL EMERGENCY THERE WOULD BE NO GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY.

5. ASKED HOW LONG GOVERNMENT FORMATION WOULD TAKE, PERES QUIPPED, "ONE WEEK, IF WE HAVE A MAJORITY," OTHERWISE, HE ESTIMATED SOME TWO MONTHS THE LONGEST IS HAS EVER TAKEN IN ISRAEL WAS 10 WEEKS.

6. PERES BELIEVED THAT WITH A MINIMUM OF 45 SEATS (WHICH IS HIS OPE) THE ALIGNMENT COULD RETAIN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE AND FINANCE PORTFOLIOS. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHAT THEN COULD HE GIVE THE DMC? HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT YADIN WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY; MEIR AMIT WOULD BE SATISFIED WITH INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, AND AMNON RUBENSTEIN WITH THE JUSTICE PORTFOLIO. PERES HOPES TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MINISTRIES FROM 18 TO 16. HE WILL ELIMINATE FOUR AND ADD TWO: AN EXPANDED MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND ONE FOR ENERGY AND SCIENCE. HE WANTS TO PLACE ABSORPTION MATTERS IN THE HANDS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, HE WOULD GIVE JERUSALEM MAYOR TEDDY KOLLEK WIDE RESPONSIBILITIES IN THIS AREA, ADDING, "I'M A GREAT BELIEVER IN KOLLEK." HOWEVER, PERES HAD NO INTENTION OF ESTABLISHING A SPECIAL MINISTRY FOR ARAB AFFAIRS. HE WILL APPOINT ARABS TO HIGH POSITIONS IN THE GOVERNMENT, PERHAPS TO ONE OR TWO DEPUTY MINISTERSHIPS, DEPENDING ON HOW WELL THE UNITED ARAB LIST DOES IN THE ELECTION. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE INDICATED CONCERN THAT RAKAH WILL INCREASE ITS STRENGTH TO 6 OR 7 SEATS. HE HELD OUT LITTLE HOPE THAT THE OTHER SMALL PARTIES WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT REPRESENTATION IN THE KNESSET. TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THE ILO AND THE SHLOMZION HE GAVE EACH, AT BEST, ONE SEAT.

7. PERES THOUGHT THE KEY TO A RESUMPTION OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE WAS HELD BY SADAT: "IF HE WANTS TO, WE COULD GO THIS YEAR." HE REPEATED THE SKEPTICISM HE EXPRESSED TO THE NDU YESTERDAY ON THE CHANCES FOR AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT AND AGAIN INDICATED HOPE IN FURTHER INTERIM AGREEMENTS

8. COMMENT: PERES, WHO WAS ABOUT TO TAKE OFF FOR A HANDSHAKING TOUR OF THE HAIFA PORT AREA AND ANOTHER GRUELING DAY OF CAMPAIGNING, LOOKED TIRED AND SOMEWHAT PREOCCUPIED, DESPITE THE EARLY HOUR. NONETHELESS, HIS RESPONSES, PUNCTUATED BY FLASHES OF HUMOR, WERE CANDID, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CLEAR AND CONCISE. HE COMES ACROSS AS A SKILLFUL, SHREWD, EXPERIENCED POLITICIAN; AND DEPENDING UPON THE ELECTION OUTCOME, HE COULD WELL PROVE TO BE A STRONG LEADER. THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION, THERE WAS THE UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION THAT HE WOULD BE ASKED TO FORM THE NEXT GOVERNMENT, AND, INDEED, THE POLLS CONTINUE TO REINFORCE THIS SUPPOSITION. HOWEVER, HE SHIED AWAY FROM PREDICTING THE SHAPE OF HIS COALITION AND SEEMED UNDER NO ILLUSION THAT THE BAR-GAINING WOULD BE LONG AND TEDIOUS. DUNNIGAN UNQTE CHRISTOPHER

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